



Reading Matters

GREAT BOOKS COUNCIL OF SAN FRANCISCO
SERVING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
www.greatbooks-sf.com

The Asilomar Great Books Weekend Turns Fifty

February 2008

Special Asilomar Edition

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Reading Matters Has A New Look

And It's Even Better on the Web

Visit www.greatbooks-sf.com to view the newsletter in color



Your First Time At Asilomar?

You'll enjoy the weekend. Nearly everyone does. And you're likely to come back. Many people do. Yet, there are some things you should know about the Asilomar Great Books Weekend.

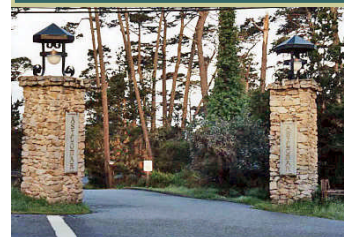
It's best to arrive between 3:00 pm and 5:00 pm on Friday. The earlier the better so you'll have time to settle yourself into your room and look through the folder of information you'll receive when you check in. Your name tag will be in the folder. The number on it indicates your discussion group. You will also find a sheet that tells you where your group meets — and it

will probably be a different place for each of the four discussions. Also, you will see the location of the Reception and Orientation for Newcomers. It will be your welcome to Asilomar and a source for answers to the questions you may have.

The four discussions are the heart and soul of the Asilomar experience. Half of the people in each discussion will have the same group number as you so you'll get to know them before the weekend is over. The other half will be from a different group number so they'll be new to you. And

(Continued on page 2)

The Asilomar Great Books Weekend April 11-13, 2008



Entering Asilomar



Asilomar's Main Building Phoebe Hearst Social Hall (Where You'll Check In)

Workshop for Leaders and Readers

Mary Wood

The Workshop for Leaders on Saturday, May 3 at Rossmoor is a **training session for readers as well as leaders.**

Do you want to become a better participant? Then this workshop is for you.

I find my reading is enriched when I read to lead. When I lead I read for questions; when I am a participant I develop my own interpretation. When I lead I encourage group participation; when I discuss I'm out to sell my interpretation.

The workshop also provides an excellent opportunity to see different leadership styles in action.

Our fourfold training approach includes reading, watching, listening and doing: reading material to study before the workshop, watching a demonstration group; listening to short presentations by experienced leaders, and doing it — the opportunity to lead two small group discussions.

A flier with signup instructions for the Workshop for Leaders

(Continued on page 2)

Saturday, May 3, 2008

Workshop for Leaders at Rossmoor.

Sign up using the flier and application form inside this newsletter.

Even if you have no plans of becoming a leader, this workshop will help you enhance and bring a new dimension to your Great Books experience.

We send our best wishes to Asilomar Chair Howard Crane who is at home recovering from illness, and regret that we won't be seeing him at this year's Asilomar Great Books Weekend.

We do take our discussions seriously. But that doesn't mean we don't have fun too.

Your First Time At Asilomar? (Continued)

(Continued from page 1)
you will have a different discussion leader each session.

We follow the time-tested Shared Inquiry discussion practices of Great Books. The main points are 1) everyone will have read the book in advance, 2) the leader only asks questions (doesn't teach or offer opinions), 3) we stay on the topic (interpretation of the text), and 4) we don't refer to outside references or authorities. Even if this method of book discussion is new to you, it will grow on you as the weekend progresses.

Some first-timers choose not to

The Reception and Orientation for Newcomers will be your welcome to Asilomar and will provide answers to the questions on your mind.

speaking up in discussion. Don't be shy; your ideas and interpretations of the books are as valuable as anyone's. Great Books is, after all, a Gathering of Equals and newcomers are on an equal footing with old-timers. We want to hear from you.

We do take our discussions seriously. But that doesn't mean we don't have fun too. A lot of it. We meet fascinating people — folks like yourself with a variety of interests and backgrounds who are a pleasure to know. And it's hard not to have a good time at the Saturday evening program and party. This year's party will celebrate our fiftieth year of Asilomar Great Books Weekends. You won't want to miss it.

Finally, you will be asked to evaluate each discussion and the weekend. You'll find an evaluation form in your folder. Your completed form can be turned in at Sunday's lunch. Please give serious thought to your evaluation; let us know how you feel about your experience at Asilomar. These evaluations are the single most important way for us to learn how we can improve the weekend.

"Leading is similar to biking or driving; it is learned by *doing*. The Workshop for Leaders gives you a safe environment to learn and practice your leadership skills."

Great Books Council Publications don't mail themselves!



Executive Committee members getting the 2008 Asilomar Flier and the Fall-Winter 2007 issue of *Reading Matters* ready for mailing.



Workshop for Leaders and Readers (Continued)

(Continued from page 1)
is included with this newsletter. The Workshop is from 9:30am — 4:30pm at Rossmoor in Walnut Creek and will be followed by a brief social gathering. The \$20 event fee covers the room, copying and mailing charges, coffee and pastries in the morning, and soft drinks in the afternoon. Please bring your own bag lunch.

Leading is similar to biking or driving; it is learned by *doing*. The Workshop for Leaders gives you a safe environment to learn and practice your leadership skills. Having a good experience gives you the confidence to go forward. Initially I thought you had to be a teacher to lead. When I was asked to lead, I accepted because I was flattered. I also saw an opportunity to make a contribution to Great Books.

Great Books leaders are really facilitators.

The rule that leaders may only ask questions not answer them defines facilitating rather than leading or teaching. Facilitating means helping the group to develop its own interpretation.

Two significant aspects of leading are the people and readings involved, and both vary by event. When you lead your own book group, you become familiar with the way people react to each other and approach the material — argumentative or encouraging, optimistic or pessimistic, analytical or emotional. When you lead at a council event, you are working with a one-time group who may not know each other.

If there are people in your group who you think would make good leaders, please encourage them to take Workshop for Leaders. Like me, they may just be waiting to be asked.

Choices (Electronically Speaking)

You can now stay up-to-date with Great Books information by subscribing to our new Electronic Newsletter. Or you can receive this newsletter, *Reading Matters*, in color via the e-mail rather than in from your letter carrier. You can do both. For either option, contact Jim Hall at jimsrhall@earthlink.net providing him with your e-mail address, name and zip code.

More Attractions at the Asilomar Great Books Weekend

Kay White



Asilomar
Beach

Save this Page
Bring it with you to Asilomar



The Lone Cypress
On 17 Mile Drive

Add more adventure to your weekend at Asilomar! Bring your children, grandchildren, and energetic friends. Plan in between and around our book discussions. School vacation is scheduled for the week before or after our conference weekend by some districts. Can you come early? Or stay after? Monterey County is filled with world-class attractions.

Our Saturday morning discussion (April 12) ends at 11:30 am. You have four hours before our next afternoon discussion. Request a box lunch when you register for our Great Books conference to maximize your excursion time. Check our Great Books registration table on Friday afternoon for details.

Here are some ideas for you:

Asilomar Conference grounds- Explore 107 acres of natural ecological environment with coastal boardwalks and self-guided walking tours. Check out the outdoor pool (heated but *brrrr*) and sand volleyball court. There is a lending library and board games, ping-pong and billiard tables for guests in the Phoebe Hearst Social Hall. Sitting next to the lodge fireplace feels good too.

Bicycle along the beautiful coast on Sunset Drive and Ocean View Blvd. to Lovers' Point. Full equipment rentals available at Asilomar Phoebe Hearst Social Hall store.

Asilomar Beach – Explore the beach within walking distance of the conference grounds and walk around the natural reserve with dunes and surf (chilly water around 55°). Seashore winds are great for flying kites.

Point Pinos Lighthouse- See the oldest active lighthouse on the west coast. It began operating along the rocky shores of Monterey Bay in 1855 for the shipping industry. It is out of view from the street, on the edge of a golf course in Pacific Grove. Built primarily of stone and with the original Third Order Fresnel lens, in clear weather its light can be seen 15 miles away. Saturday and Sunday 1-4 p.m. Suggested donation of \$2/adult and \$1/youth. Asilomar Avenue behind Lighthouse Avenue and Del Monte Blvd. Pacific Grove, CA 93950 (831) 648-5716 or

(408) 648-3116 www.pgmuseum.org

Pacific Grove's Good Old Days – *This weekend only*, April 12 and 13, Saturday and Sunday afternoon, center of town, rain or shine, a community celebration with miniature golf, carnival rides, 230 crafters, firefighters' competition, walking tours from Pacific Grove Natural History Museum, live entertainment on four stages. www.pacificgrove.org.

Four Miles Drive – The best free coast and neighborhood views; from Sunset Drive in Asilomar Beach, on to Ocean View Drive in Pacific Grove. Not too crowded and close to the Asilomar Conference Center.

Monterey Bay Aquarium – visit for 2+ hours, Saturday or Sunday afternoon. See Mission to the Deep with hands-on experience of underwater robots; Giant Octopuses; Kelp Forest; Jellies; Sandy Shores with an underwater look at bat rays through a periscope or even a gentle touch; Rocky Shores; Life in the Outer Bay, a 1 million gallon tank with schooling tunas and hammerhead sharks.

Admission \$25, \$16 ages 3-12, \$23, seniors, and \$23, students ages 13-18. You can buy your ticket in advance on line, or call (800) 756-3737. 886 Cannery Row Monterey, <http://secure2.gatewayticketing.com/montereybay/webstore/shop/ticket-selection.aspx>.

Monterey Sports Center. Swim and Workout with two indoor heated pools (complete with a 112-foot water slide), a full weight training and cardio fitness center. Recreational swim for all ages on Saturday and Sunday, noon to 4:30 p.m. Showers and lockers are included in admission: \$7.50 adults, \$4.50 ages 6-17, \$2.50 ages 5 and under—must be with an adult. (Childcare while you work out, up to 2 hours, \$4 per child, Saturday from 8-1:30 p.m.) 301 E. Franklin Street off Del Monte Avenue adjacent to City parking

(Continued on page 4)

Attractions (Continued)

(Continued from page 3)

garages.

(831) 646-3700
www.monterey.org/sportscenter

Monterey Youth Museum-MY Museum- designed for curious folks 8 years and younger with hands on exhibits including The Creation Station with arts and crafts materials; The Magnet Table; Fire Truck; Water Blocks for toddlers; Build a House including plumbing and inside the walls; Body Works for mini-medical office with real crutches and equipment, and the Pet Vet to learn about animals; Magic Finger Painting by computer without the mess; MY Pizzeria to make your own pizza, MY Theater with a puppet stage, costumes, props and lights, and BIG exhibits including a Giant Loom, super-size puzzle, and jumbo kaleidoscope. Saturday until 5 p.m. \$5.50 for children and adults. 601 Wave Street, Suite 100 Monterey CA 93940, (831) 649-6444
www.mymuseum.org

Point Lobos State Reserve – See sea lions, harbor seals, sea otters, and seabirds in this reserve with shoreline cypress trees, and wave-pounded boulders. Picnic, paint, photograph along seven miles of gentle paths leading to Whalers and Bluefish Coves. The Reserve is three miles south of Carmel on Highway 1.

(831) 624-4909 \$8 vehicle entry fee or \$4 with a senior pass.
www.ptlobos.parks.state.ca.us/information.htm

17 mile Drive – The drive from Pacific Grove to Carmel has about 7 miles along the water. Cruise past luxury mansions, extraordinary coastal views, wind sculpted trees, the Links at Spanish Bay, Spyglass Hill Golf Course, Cypress Point Club and Pebble Beach Golf Links. How about a box lunch at Seal Rock Picnic Area, a beach with a view of Bird Rock, often covered with pelicans, seals, and sea lions? The Pacific Grove gate is open from sunrise to sunset, \$8 per vehicle.

Tor House and Hawk Tower – **Reservations are required at least one week in advance** to tour the home built by poet Robinson Jeffers on the Carmel coast. The stone home is small yet impressive. Its coziness is almost magical as you walk inside from the cold ocean air and crashing surf. For safety, no children under 12 years old allowed. \$7 adults, \$4 college students, \$2 high school students. 26304 Ocean View Avenue, just to the south of Carmel Village. Request a Saturday tour for 1 or 2 p.m. by phone at (831) 624-1840 or (831) 624-1813, or by e-mail
www.torhouse.org/tours

Carmel Mission – Visit the Basilica and National

Shrine of Junipero Serra, built in 1771. This is a fine example of the mission system studied in California's 4th grade school curriculum. There are self-guided tours, and may be a complimentary Docent tour at 2 p.m. The mission is open on Saturdays and Sundays until 5 p.m. The all-inclusive admission fee for the grounds, Basilica and museums is \$5 adults, \$4 seniors, and \$1 for children under 17. It is about 7 miles (a 19 minute drive) from Asilomar to 3080 Rio Road, Carmel, CA 93923
www.carmelmission.org/tours

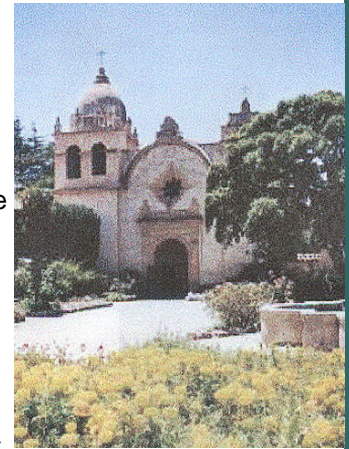
Commercial Activities

Glass Bottom Boat cruise on Monterey Bay – Cruise for 25 minutes on the Monterey Bay. Board at 90 Fisherman's Wharf #1, Monterey at the end of Fisherman's Wharf. \$10 adults, \$8 children under 12
(831) 372-7151

Whale Watching – Chris' Whale Watching for 2 hours on Monterey Bay, Call first for times and reservations, and ask for a 1 p.m. tour (831) 375-5951 \$22 adults, \$15 children, at Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey.
www.chriswhalewatching.com

Monterey Bay Kayaks – Sneak up on wildlife in Monterey Bay by kayak. Make sure boats are

(Continued on page 5)



The Carmel Mission

Come Earlier; Stay Longer

If you'd like to spend an extra day or two at Asilomar before or after the Great Books Weekend you may be able to do just that (if, of course, rooms are available).

Call Asilomar at their toll free number 866-654-2879 or make reservations online at www.visitasilomar.com/reservations.



The Robinson
Jeffers
Tor House



Point Pinos
Lighthouse

Historic Rooms
for Asilomar
are now
SOLD OUT



Attractions (Continued)

(Continued from page 4)

available by calling in advance (800) 649-5357 or (831) 373-5357. Located at 693 Del Monte Avenue next to Fisherman's Wharf in Monterey. All gear provided including wetsuit, life jacket. Renters must be good swimmers. \$30 per person. www.montereybaykayaks.com

Baby Sitters - While we cannot recommend specific sitters, here are two sites for parents to consider:

VIP Babysitting and Corporate Kids Events. Gouveria and Associates Babysitting (831) 394-5449 www.vipbabysitting.com Around \$20 per hour, minimum 4 hours

Monterey Baby Sitting Service, Carmel. Attention Anna Masteller (831) 601-8881 www.sitterlink.com

These activities are offered as suggestions and not sponsored or endorsed by the Great Books Council.

Utopia at the Picnic

On Sunday June 8 we will be visiting not only Tilden Regional Park in the Berkeley hills, but also Shangri-La high in the Himalayas. Our discussion, after a brief meeting, will be of James Hilton's classic, *Lost Horizon* set in the utopian valley of the blue moon.

You'll have a great time picnicking with friends and discussing a thought provoking novel. Save the date and look for more information in the next issue of *Reading Matters*. You can also contact **Kathleen Conneely**, 510-530-2344.

London Tour For Thinkers V

Ted Kraus will be leading this, his fifth London Theatre Tour, during the dates October 20-25, 2008. Last year the group saw and discussed — Great Books style — five plays.

More information, including an account of the 2007 tour, will be in the next issue of *Reading Matters*. Contact **Ted** tedmkraus@yahoo.com or 510-530-2344.

Shared Inquiry for the Theatre

More Noteworthy Events

Chicago



Great Books Chicago 2008 April 25-27. The theme is *Deadly Sins* with three lively discussions using selections from the Foundation's recent *Seven Deadly Sins Sampler*. Weekend includes a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, Opera's Ten Deadly Sins, a program by Toronto's "Meistersinner" and opera educator, Iain Scott and more. Call 800-222-5870 or Gary Schoepfel, gschoepfel@chumsci.edu.

Toronto



Toronto Pursuits July 13-18. The focus is on creativity in later life with choices ranging from plays by Shakespeare & O'Neill, works of Beethoven, Henry Adams, Dostoevsky and more. As the San Francisco connection, Louise DiMattio and William Corbett Jones will attend. Bill will play later works of Beethoven. Contact Ann Kirkland ann.kirkland@classicalpursuits.com (Also contact Ann Kirkland for information about Travel Pursuits events throughout the year in various worldwide locations.)

Bellingham



Pacific Northwest Great Books Institute June 20-22. A beautiful venue with friendly people. Reading selections: *Doubt*, John Patrick Shanley; *Heart of the Matter*, Graham Greene; *Summer Before the Dark*, Doris Lessing. Contact mastark@att.net

Workshop for Leaders – A Personal Experience

Tracy Oliver

I have found the Workshop for Leaders to be both an enjoyable and enlightening experience. Here are some thoughts on what the workshop did for me in my personal Great Books quest.

As a **new member**, the workshop helped me in several ways.

It opened up new vistas in reading to me. Prior to the experience my standard response to a poetry reading was that my mind started to wander and my eyes began to glaze over. Now, not only do I look forward to reading and discussing poetry -- I am an avid Robert Frost fan.

The workshop gave me an in-depth understanding and respect for the shared inquiry method. When I was new to Great Books and first heard about the rules of discussion I remember thinking that they seemed a bit rigid. Now, I realize how fundamental the shared inquiry method is to our ability to jointly develop a deeper understanding of readings in an environment of mutual trust and respect.

It gave me the courage to practice my new leadership skills. While my initial goal in attending the workshop was simply to gain a better understanding of Great Books and perhaps emerge a better reader and participant, the workshop actually encouraged me to try out my new skills in the supportive environment of my personal book group.

Now, as a more **experienced member** of Great Books, the workshop continues to assist me in various ways.

The workshop helps me improve and enhance my leading/facilitating skills. It has been my experience that everyone (both leaders and participants) bring something insightful and unique to the training. It makes for a day full of “ah-hah” moments and new insights.

It provides new and interesting reading material that I look forward to sharing with my book group.

And finally, the workshop enables me to explore something I love (great books) with other people who share my passion for a great book discussion.

From One of Our Readers

In the last issue of this newsletter, I expressed the notion that outside references are not created equal — some harm discussions but others don't and that we can tolerate those that don't. I used the example of a time when, as a discussion leader, I acted hastily in cutting off a benign outside reference and should have given the participant some slack.

Not everyone agreed. **Janice White** expressed a different point of view, one that is no doubt closer to the mainstream than mine. Here is part of what she wrote:

“I think we have the standards so as to preclude the need to assess each instance as it comes up. . . Your assumption that everyone knows who Polonius (is) is

Why I love to Lead Great Books Discussions

Louise DiMattio

I love to lead Great Books discussions because I love to read with the search for questions always in the back of my mind. I am, by nature, more confused by things than I am certain of them. I could never be accused of asking questions with a specific answer in mind. I honestly don't know any answers, even the most obvious! So, reading for questions is second nature to me. I love to formulate lots of questions and imagine where each of them will take my group. I often come prepared with scores of questions on my yellow legal pad.

I remember well the legendary leader Stan Dennison, “Father”, who always opened the discussion with a profound question, an absolute silver bullet that left me speechless and floundering. He would then sit quietly with a Cheshire cat-like grin on his face while the group struggled come to grips with what his question even meant and how it related to the reading. Sometime in the middle of our two hours together, Stan simply repeated the same question again. Amazing discussions ensued.

For years I have wanted to emulate Stan, narrowing down and whittling away at my list of questions until one sublimely perfect question is left. Then one day quite recently I realized that I love my list of questions. I save them and feel they are superior to those found in the reader's guides published by the booksellers on the internet. In fact, I often suspect that the authors of those questions have never actually spent the time to read the book! (I would never, however, say that about Stan.)

I guess I'll just accept my list and not search for the perfect question. I've come to the realization that I treasure my list too much to give it up.

We at *Reading Matters* love to hear from our readers. If you would like to express your point of view in response to one of our articles or on any other subject of interest to Great Books enthusiasts, please send your thoughts to me, Chuck Scarcliff: ckdxs@sbcglobal.net.

precisely the elitism that we seek to avoid in making it a level playing field. I hear these kinds of assertions often in meetings often having to do with the Bible. These observations can certainly be interesting but are outside of meetings. . . . And furthermore, it was disquieting to read your piece in the newsletter because coming from a respected veteran such as yourself; it undermines the resolve of leaders (especially the newer ones) to honor the format.”

Well said. And except for the part about my being a “respected” veteran, Janice makes good sense with everything she says. I appreciate her taking the time to share her thoughts with us.

Chuck Scarcliff

Long Novel Weekend — 2008

The Cairo Trilogy

First published in the late 1950s, *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street* take Sayid Amad Abd al-Jawad and his family from the time of the 1919 Revolution in Egypt (against the British) to the mid 1940s. The trilogy, this year's Long Novel Weekend selection chronicles changes both to the family (with its marriages, births, the aging of its members and its deaths) and to Egypt.

Mahfouz populates these novels with some of the most interesting characters you'll meet in the pages of fiction. They are more than merely products of their religion and nationality. Sayid Amad Abd al-Jawad, his family and friends are individuals with the strengths and weaknesses we find anywhere on the globe.

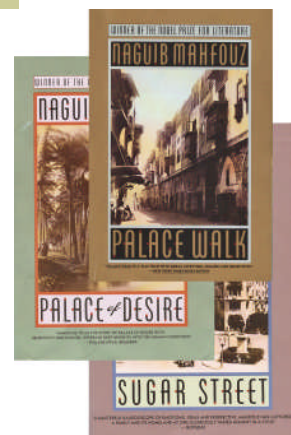
As much as anything, the subject of the trilogy could be change — social change, ideological change, political change and most of all change to the lives and the people we find in the pages of *The Cairo Trilogy*. It's well worth reading.



Who is Mahfouz?

By any measure, Naguib (NahGWEEB) Mahfouz is one of the world's great 20th century novelists. At times called "the Egyptian Balzac," Mahfouz was the first Arabic writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1988). His 40 novels and short story collections, many plays, screenplays, and countless magazine articles (relatively few translated into English) continue to have a wide readership in the Arabic speaking world. But Mahfouz also became a source of controversy in the Middle East by supporting President Sadat's Camp David treaty with Israel and by criticizing Iran for condemning Salmon Rushdie to death (but he later criticized Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* as being insulting to Islam).

Mahfouz was born in Cairo in 1911 and died in 2006. His early works were historical novels written with the intent of covering the entire history of Egypt with a series of books. He later shifted to contemporary settings where he strived to demonstrate the psychological effect social change has on the life of ordinary people.



Save These Dates!

August 23-24, 2008

The 2008 Long Novel Weekend at Walker Creek Ranch in Marin County

Contact Louise DiMattio, ladimat@aol.com for more information.

Poetry Weekend — November 2007

We had a few minutes of rain at Westminster Retreat last November, but nothing a committed crowd of Great Books and poetry enthusiasts couldn't take in stride. Thirty-eight of us enjoyed a weekend of three discussions and an evening of light-hearted entertainment.

The first session's theme was *The Observed Self* and of the six poems dealing with that subject, two began with a person looking into a mirror. Saturday afternoon was the potpourri session with discussions of seven poems on a variety of topics. They included Shakespeare's masterpiece of irony, Sonnet CXXX and D. H. Lawrence's "The Snake" in which an encounter with a poisonous snake leads the poet to think of the snake's majesty and kingli-

ness (a "lord of life") and then to reflect upon his own human pettiness. For the final, Sunday morning session we discussed only one poem, but it was a long one and very good one — Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

We were well entertained — and we entertained ourselves — on Saturday evening with The SuperWhiz Poetry Quiz. As teams, we answered (or tried hard to answer) questions that came from the weekend's poetry selections. After that, using the Shakespeare sonnet as a guide (It's the one that begins "My mistress' breasts are nothing like the sun.") we wrote our own versions, some of them hilarious, and had a good time in the process.



Westminster Retreat
Site of the Annual
Poetry Weekend



Serving Northern California
c/o Jan Vargo
2835 Shasta Road
Berkeley, CA 94708-2011
E-Mail: vargopack@cs.co

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The Books We'll Read and Discuss

Even among those who seldom read poems, Friday evening's poetry discussions are always crowd-pleasers. The selections are always good ones. Here are the poems we'll be talking about this year:

"The Moose in the Morning," Mona Van Duyn; "The City and its Own," Irving Feldman; "The Master Speed," Robert Frost; "The Naming of the Parts," Henry Reed; "The Bog Queen," Seamus Heaney; and "Aristotle," Billy Collins.

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is one of the great novels of America and the world. The story of Hester Prynne who the Puritan society made wear a scarlet letter "A" as a sign of her adultery is one of courage. And even for those who are well acquainted with the novel, there is always more to find in it, to ponder and discuss.

Painting Churches by Tina Howe is this year's play. It's the story of a family with interesting members facing the problems many of our own families must confront. There are the conflicts families have, but always with love and consideration.

For nonfiction, we have selections from ***The Discourses*** of Niccolo Machiavelli. In case you are acquainted with *The Prince*, this is a different kind of book with a practical and reflective analysis of the institutions, laws and traditions of governments that work well for the populace and ruling classes alike.



A Discussion at Asilomar

Asilomar 2008